



Promotional information provided by the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce.

# Chamber Connection

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## Building a Stronger Future Through 2026 Legislative Days

The Citrus County Chamber of Commerce recently led and organized the 2026 Legislative Days in Tallahassee, bringing together more than 130 Citrus County community members and local leaders for two impactful days of advocacy and engagement at the Florida Capitol. The delegation represented a unified effort to ensure Citrus County's priorities and perspectives were clearly communicated at the state level.

The trip began on Wednesday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, with a series of special meetings focused on relationship building and meaningful dialogue with state leaders and agency representatives. These conversations laid the groundwork for productive discussions on issues directly affecting Citrus County's future, including like Florida Dept of Environmental Protection, Ag Commissioner Wilton Simpson, Florida Housing Finance Corp, Florida Office of Insurance Regulation and many more that set the tone. The Governor's Club dinner on Wednesday evening provided an additional opportunity for deeper engagement and relationship building between Citrus County leaders and state officials, reinforcing the value of continued collaboration and access beyond the formal session.

Thursday's Legislative Session brought the full delegation together for focused discussion, shared priorities, and a strong collective voice. Attendees gained insight from state and industry leaders, including Frank Walker, Executive Vice President of Governmental and Political Relations with the Florida Chamber of Commerce; Sam Garrison, Speaker Designate of the Florida House of Representatives; Jared Perdue, Secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation; Alex Kelly, Secretary of Florida Commerce; and JJ Grow, Representative for Florida House District 23.

Additional perspectives were shared by Dr. Kevin O'Farrell, Senior Chancellor with the Florida Department of Education, and Jeff Kottkamp, former Lieutenant Governor and President and Chief Executive Officer of Florida TaxWatch. The Legislative Day Luncheon was highlighted by an address from First



Lady Casey DeSantis, who served as the keynote speaker.

A meaningful highlight of this year's Legislative Days was hearing from two of our key local advocates, Senator Ralph Massullo and Representative JJ Grow, whose long-standing leadership and community service bring a truly local lens to state level conversations. Senator Massullo's decades of experience as a physician and community leader, along with Representative Grow's background rooted in agriculture, business, and service, provide practical insight into the issues that impact residents, employers, healthcare, and workforce needs. Their presence helped reinforce the importance of having strong representation in Tallahassee that understands our community firsthand and is committed to advancing local priorities.

The Citrus County Chamber of Commerce is proud to lead Legislative Days as a key advocacy initiative that brings residents, business owners, and community leaders together with one unified voice. The strong turnout and high level of participation underscore the importance Citrus County places on collaboration, initiative-taking leadership, and having a seat at the table when decisions are made.

Legislative Days remains an important investment in the future of our community and a powerful reminder that when Citrus County shows up together, our voice carries weight.



## Strawberries, Crowns, and Community Tradition Return to Floral City

Each spring, Floral City comes alive with the sights, sounds, and flavors of one of Citrus County's most cherished traditions. The 39th Annual Floral City Strawberry Festival returns to Floral Park on March 7 and 8, 2026, welcoming residents and visitors for a weekend rooted in community, agriculture, and family fun.

Presented by Coast to Coast Heating & Air, LLC and produced by the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce, the festival draws thousands of attendees eager to celebrate the simple joys that have defined the event for generations. From locally grown strawberries to Ferris Groves to live music, food and beverage offerings, and a wide variety of vendors, the festival offers something for every age and interest.

A highlight of the weekend is the return of the Strawberry Princess Pageants, a longtime festival tradition held Saturday morning. Young participants take the stage hoping to be crowned Little Miss Strawberry Princess or Miss Strawberry Princess, continuing a legacy that dates back to the early days of the festival. The pageants are designed to be fun, encouraging, and confidence building, giving children a chance to shine while creating memories that last long after the crowns are placed.

In addition to the pageants, festivalgoers can enjoy live entertainment throughout the weekend, take part in the always popular pie eating contests, explore kids' activities, and browse arts, crafts, and business vendors lining the park. Whether attending for the strawberries, the entertainment, or the tradition itself, the festival remains a gathering place for the community.

Admission to the festival is \$5 per adult, with children 12 and under admitted free.

### Little Miss Strawberry Princess & Miss Strawberry Princess Pageant

Saturday, March 7, 2026  
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.  
Floral Park, Floral City

#### AGE CATEGORIES:

Little Miss Strawberry Princess (ages 2-6)  
Miss Strawberry Princess (ages 7-12)

REGISTRATION: \$10 per contestant  
DEADLINE: February 17, 2026

Registration must be completed in advance. No day-of registrations will be accepted.

#### REGISTER ONLINE:

[www.GoStrawberryFest.com/princess-pageants/](http://www.GoStrawberryFest.com/princess-pageants/)

### Calling All Vendors – APPLICATIONS CLOSE SOON!

Vendor applications are closing soon for the 39th Annual Floral City Strawberry Festival, happening March 7 - 8, 2026 at Floral Park in Floral City. Artists, makers, food vendors, and small businesses are invited to apply to be part of one of Citrus County's most well-attended and beloved festivals.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 7, 2026  
APPLY ONLINE: [www.GoStrawberryFest.com](http://www.GoStrawberryFest.com)

Vendor spaces are limited and fill quickly.

Free parking and shuttle service will be available from the Citrus County Auditorium, with shuttles running continuously throughout both days of the event.

Festival hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Visitors are

encouraged to enjoy not only the festival grounds, but also the welcoming charm of the Floral City community.

For festival updates, entertainment announcements, and additional event details, visit [www.GoStrawberryFest.com](http://www.GoStrawberryFest.com).

**39TH ANNUAL FLORAL CITY STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL**  
MARCH 7-8, 2026  
Floral Park, Floral City, FL  
Free Parking/Shuttle from Citrus County Auditorium  
ENTRY ONLY \$5.00/Adult | FREE for Children 12 & Under

**LIVE MUSIC**  
**LOCAL STRAWBERRIES**  
**PIE EATING CONTEST**  
**STRAWBERRY PRINCESS PAGEANT**

**FOOD COURT**  
**BEER & WINE GARDEN**  
**KIDS ACTIVITIES**  
**ARTS, CRAFTS, & BUSINESS VENDORS**

[WWW.GOSTRAWBERRYFEST.COM](http://WWW.GOSTRAWBERRYFEST.COM)

### 2026 Floral City Strawberry Festival Sponsors



## The Road Ahead for Citrus County

Join us for our February Chamber Luncheon featuring County Administrator Steve Howard. He will be providing a comprehensive wrap-up of 2025 and share some forward-looking updates on priorities and plans for the new year. Attendees will gain insight into countywide growth, infrastructure, and key initiatives shaping the future of Citrus County.

#### DETAILS

February 13th, 2026;  
11:30am-1pm;  
Citrus Hills  
Golf & Country Club  
Networking:

### FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

FEBRUARY 13TH, 2026  
11:30AM - 1:00PM  
Citrus Hills Golf & Country Club

County Administrator  
**STEVE HOWARD**

Sponsored By: **Centratel**  
Cloud Solutions Ground Support

11:30am-12pm  
Program/Speaker:  
12pm-1pm  
Speaker:  
County Administrator  
Steve Howard  
Sponsor: Centratel

Pricing:  
\$30 – Members  
\$35 – Non-members  
Advanced reservations are required, online at [www.CitrusCountyChamber.com](http://www.CitrusCountyChamber.com). No walk-ups will be accepted.

### Chamber Legacy Members



The Chamber recognizes our Legacy Partners that have made a special investment in the Chamber to support the programs and mission of the Chamber. For information on becoming a Legacy Partner, please contact the Chamber by emailing [Corrine@CitrusCountyChamber.com](mailto:Corrine@CitrusCountyChamber.com).

## UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

- 02/13 February Chamber Luncheon; 11:30am – 1:00pm; Citrus Hills Golf & Country Club
- 02/19 February Chamber "Ball Drop" Mixer; 5:00pm – 7:00pm; Chamber Office
- 02/22 CCBA Annual Jim Blackshear Memorial Golf Outing; Twisted Oaks Golf Course
- 03/07 – 03/08 39th Annual Floral City Strawberry Festival; Floral Park